DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 684 EA 020 418

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TITLE Managed Equality: Educational Administrators, Efficiency, and the Politics of Reading Instruction.
PUB DATE Apr 88
NOTE 52p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 5-9, 1988).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrative Principles; *Educational Administration; Educational Change; Educational Philosophy; *Efficiency; Elementary Secondary Education; *Equal Education; Organizational Effectiveness; *Politics of Education; School Effectiveness

ABSTRACT

While educational researchers in recent years have sought new approaches to educational administration, educational administrators have continued to rely on ideals of efficiency, because efficiency provides a set of tools that they can wield in the internal politics of public education. This paper contends that the politics of efficiency in school administration maintains school structures and processes that limit the educational opportunities of disadvantaged students, not because administrators lack good intentions, but because they lack other resources for the effective exercise of influence. The first section of the paper provides rigorous definitions of key terms in the discussion: "efficiency," "politics," "ambiguity," "autonomy," and "vulnerability." These perspectives on school politics were developed from an extensive qualitative analysis of school reading programs, from which generalizable conclusions were drawn about administrative practices associated with the notion of efficiency: articulating goals, providing organization and coordination, acquiring information, and evaluating performance. In attending to these four dimensions of efficiency, administrators treated organizational maintenance as the equivalent of educational effectiveness, and the need to maintain existing organizational arrangements thus takes precedence over the need to address educational problems these arrangements seem incapable of solving. Organizational maintenance and subordinate support keep equality issues off the administrator's educational agenda. References and endnotes are included. (TE)

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MANAGED EQUALITY:

Educational Administrators, Efficiency, and the Politics of Reading Instruction

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April 1988

Paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 5-9, 1988)

EA 020 418

Education is not like a factory, where you're just turning out students. (Urban official)

The child is our most important product. (Urban principal)

Educational administration is in transition. The 1970s and 80s have seen a spate of books, articles, and essays arguing for new approaches to educational administration, approaches which abandon bureaucratic orthodoxy in favor of organizational ambiguity (Clark and McKibbin, 1982). Theory X has given way to Theory Z; planning has given way to muddling through; organizational charts have given way to garbage cans; and the cult of efficiency has given way to the call for effectiveness. In short, change is in the wind.

Or is it? While educational researchers have sought new ways to characterize what goes on in schools, educational administrators have continued to administer. And they have done so largely by relying on the very aphorisms many researchers have been urging them to abandon, particularly the aphorisms of efficiency. We can imagine many reasons for this state of affairs: bureaucratic inertia; individual preferences; public pressure; school culture. And indeed, all of these factors undoubtedly play a role. It is my contention, however, that

there is an additional reason the efficiency motif continues to haunt educational administration. New models of organizational leadership notwithstanding, administrators cling to efficiency because it provides a set of tools they can wield in the internal politics of public education. Schools and school districts are structured in ways which make the exercise of administrative influence a far more difficult enterprise than the casual observer of flow charts and evaluation procedures might expect (Costa and Guditis, 1984; Fraatz, 1987). Efficiency continues to attract administrators because it is a place to begin in the search for legitimate authority in the schools. This is not to say that internal school politics is the only explanation for the preservation of efficiency ideals, or that efficiency provides the only set of political resources administrators can use. But the connection between the aphorisms of efficiency and the ambiguities of school politics is an important one that deserves more attention than it has heretofore received.

The purpose of this paper, then, is twofold. First, I will describe in some detail the administrative politics of efficiency, showing how administrators rely on efficiency practices to give them a foothold in the rocky terrain of educational politics. Second, I will suggest some of the educational consequences of the politics of efficiency, with special attention to its consequences for poor and minority students. I will argue that the politics of efficiency maintains school structures and processes which limit the educational opportunities of disadvantaged students--not because

administrators lack good intentions but because they lack resources for the effective exercise of influence.

Laying the Groundwork: Efficiency, Politics, and School Reading Programs

> "You should never confuse efficiency with a liver condition." --Mary Poppins<1>

Neither "efficiency" nor "politics" is a neutral, value-free term. At the risk of oversimplifying, it is fair to say that most people think of the former as good and the latter as bad. Furthermore, each has been defined almost as often as it has been discussed. For these reasons, it is useful to spend some time defining terms and specifying assumptions. I will also describe briefly the collection and analysis of the interview data on which this study is based.

Efficiency in education is easier to define by its absence than by its presence. "Inefficient" schools or districts are mired in bureaucratic procedures, are easily distracted from the central purposes of instruction, are slow to incorporate new technology, and generally waste the time, energy, and resources of teachers and students alike. "Efficient" schools are harder to recognize, especially as distinct from "effective" schools. Part of the difficulty lies in the complex nature of the tasks schools are expected to perform and the difficulty of ascertaining school "outputs." In this respect schools are no different from other government institutions responsible for planning and implementing social policies. Educational technology is underdeveloped and poorly understood; its outcomes

are hard to measure, and are subject to a variety of "uncontrollable and frequently unknown external factors"; and valid, reliable indicators of performance are hard to come by (Downs and Larkey, 1986). Yet even when efficiency is considered independently of the school's complicated social context, it remains an elusive concept. The more broadly it is defined, the harder it is to distinguish from other desirable features of organizational life, such as economy, rationality, and productivity. The more narrowly it is defined, the less agreement there will be on the proposed definition.

My approach to defining "efficiency" has been to strike a balance between generality and specificity, a balance which also remains faithful to the way educational administrators themselves use the term. For the purposes of this paper, "efficiency" will refer to the attempt to maximize the utilization of available resources, both human and material. In the context of the public school, this requires administrators to seek the highest level of educational benefits at a given level of resources and with a given set of constraints. This definition is, I believe, consonant with the perspectives and experiences of administrators in the schools. It is flexible enough to capture the variety of meanings they attach to "efficiency" and the range of behaviors they associate with it. At the same time, it reflects the very real pressure on school and district officials to get the most mileage out of the human and material capital they have to work with, in the face of both rising expectations and declining budgets. As one urban superintendent put it:

> What I'm saying to everyone, teachers and administrators, [is that] as you look to the future, the resources in [this district's] public schools will probably be a teacher for every 23 students, and a principal in every building. Period....Anything beyond that is a luxury--Title I, Title VII, Chapter 2, you name it. But we can make it work. We have to--always understanding it's a nightmare for me.

Efficiency doesn't require administrators to cut their own budgets, but rather to maintain "productivity" and "performance" with budgets others have cut for them (Boyd, 1983).

The meaning of "politics" in the schools is as elusive as the meaning of "efficiency." Too often, "politics" is taken to mean something along the lines of "doing unto others before they do unto you," whether the context is schools, churches, or workplaces. In this paper, however, "politics" will refer to "any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves, to a significant extent, control, influence, power, or authority" (Dahl, 1984, p. 10). The internal politics of public schooling involves attempts by educators at any level to direct or influence the behavior of others in the schools. Influence can be exercised toward a variety of ends, some self-serving and others altruistic, some instrumental and others ultimate. But irrespective of the participants' specific objectives, politics in the schools tend to center around two kinds of transactions: (1) negotiation, in which each party gains some of their objectives and sacrifices others, and (2) persuasion, in which one party attempts to convince another to change their attitudes or behaviors. Although in principle school politics may also involve control or authority, in practice these concepts were virtually absent from administrators' descriptions of how people

in schools actually work together. Teachers, principals, specialists, and district administrators carry out their responsibilities by striking bargains, selling ideas, and offering incentives to one another, seeking to gain not just cooperation but consent. In this view, then, politics is simply part of the landscape in educational organizations, as it is in any other.<2>

Several features of that landscape contribute to the special character of school politics. Bargaining and persuasion are conditioned by the following realities of life in schools: (1) Ambiguity. As suggested above, educational "technology" remains poorly specified and highly uncertain. There is also considerable vagueness about the appropriate role of the administrator in relation to the instructional mission of the schools (Costa and Guditis, 1984). Educators seldom know what works, why, or for whom. (2) Autonomy. For a variety of reasons, practical as well as principled, educators in the schools remain relatively isolated from one another. When teachers teach, the classroom door is closed. What is true of teachers is also true of principals; it is difficult for their superiors to monitor their activities very closely. And there is a widely shared but unspoken belief that autonomy is appropriate as well as inevitable. (3) Vulnerability. The uncertain connections between means and ends in the schools make educators highly vulnerable to criticism or loss of influence, not just from without, but from within. Furthermore, despite their relative autonomy, people in schools are also dependent on one

another for resources and rewards (Cohen and Murnane, 1985). Others have documented elsewhere the vulnerability of school employees, especially administrators, to external pressures from parents, local governments, and so forth (see Callahan, 1962, p. 52), but few have recognized their vulnerability to internal pressures and demands. This vulnerability is by no means a top-down affair. Administrators need the support and cooperation of their subordinates as much as subordinates need the support and cooperation of administrators (Fraatz, 1987). Together, these three features of schooling--ambiguity, autonomy, and vulnerability--impose constraints on the patterns of bargaining and persuasion that characterize educational politics. In particular, it means that administrators cannot simply rely on the chain of command in seeking to exert influence over their subordinates. A flow chart is no guarantee of legitimacy, and the administrator knows it.

These perspectives on school politics were developed in a larger study of school reading programs, from which the data for the present study were drawn. During the 1981-82 academic year, I conducted open-ended interviews with 12 building principals and 25 district officials from four districts in a northeastern state. One of these districts served a middle- and upper-class suburban population of university, professional, and business families; one was located in a working-class suburb with a large proportion of non-English-speaking immigrants; one drew from a trade-oriented city with a large black population; and one served an economically depressed industrial center with a large Hispanic

and foreign-born population. My purpose in the judgmental sampling design I employed was to maximize the variation in my respondents' social contexts, in order to identify patterns which are common across settings; I have not attempted to isolate or analyze differences, but rather similarities. Interviews lasted from 30 to 90 minutes, depending on the availability and interest of the respondent. The focus of these conversations was on school reading programs in grades 1-4, with special attention to equality of opportunity for poor and minority students. Administrators were asked to describe the policies and practices characterizing school reading programs; the provisions schools made to ensure "that each child has a fair chance to learn how to read"; the working relationships between the various educators contributing to that effort; and the nature of the administrator's own contributions to the delivery of services in reading instruction.<3>

The two hundred pages of transcripts from these 37 interviews provided a wealth of information, not just about how reading programs work, but about how schools work. Reading instruction served as an excellent vehicle for the analysis of both instructional and administrative practices, especially those intended to promote equality of opportunity. As I have argued elsewhere (Fraatz, 1987), reading programs provide a microcosm of life in classrooms, schools, and districts, largely because they are treated as part of the central mission of elementary education. Educators see reading instruction both as a means to other opportunities and as an end in itself. Thus, an

examination of the delivery of services in reading instruction can tell us a great deal about both equality and efficiency in the public schools. And it is to that examination that we now turn.

Defending the Faith: Educational Administrators and the Tenets of Efficiency

I suggested above that school administrators think of "efficiency" as making the best possible use of available resources, both human and material. My respondents identified a number of administrative practices commonly associated with this notion of efficiency. Most of these practices fell into one of four dimensions: articulating goals; providing organization and coordination; acquiring information; and evaluating performance. These dimensions represent a startling degree of continuity in administrators' conceptions of "good" educational administration. Note their similarity to the claims of Franklin Bobbitt, an early and influential proponent of scientific management in the schools, in his 1913 work, The Supervision of City Schools:

> In any organization, the directive and supervisory members must clearly define the ends toward which the organization strives. They must coordinate the labors of all so as to attain those ends. They must determine the qualifications necessary for the workers and see that each rises to the standard qualifications, if it is possible; and when impossible, see that he is separated from the organization. (Callahan, 1962, p. 80)

These four dimensions, then, set the parameters for my analysis of efficiency, equality and administrative politics in school reading programs. Each represents serious attempts by

educational administrators to maximize the "productivity" of the resources made available to them by federal, state, and local government agencies. And each is consistent with commonly-accepted definitions of efficiency, both in education and in public agencies more generally.

Articulating Goals

The first dimension of efficiency for which administrators assumed responsibilty was the articulation of educational goals. While the particular goals they articulated varied in scope and substance, principals and district officials alike shared a belief that "organizations exist to attain specific goals" and that "specifying objectives improves performance" (Clark and McKibbin, 1982, p. 670). Not surprisingly, principals tended to focus on building-level goals, and often in very broad terms:

> The principal has to provide the direction, and you can't point people in a direction if you don't know which way they're going in the first place. (Urban principal)

> The principal has to demonstrate to others her belief that reading is the most important part of the school day. (Suburban principal)

District administrators, by contrast, tended to emphasize district-wide objectives.

> I have to provide the central office direction, leadership, mission statement, etc., that leads us in the direction of a viable, ongoing, comprehensive reading program that addresses the needs of [the district's] kids....I had a vision of where I wanted to go, and then I had to articulate that to people who have to put it in place. (Urban official)

> We worked out time schedules for all the schools increasing the amount of reading and language arts they were doing within the schools. The state recommends

> that we have between 900 and 1200 minutes per week in language arts in grades 1-3. We had been offering the students approximately 800 minutes per week; we increased that to 900 minutes a week, or 180 minutes a day....Each teacher prepares a timetable, and we run a check on them to be sure they are teaching reading a minimum of 900 minutes. (Urban official)

Interestingly, the relationship between building- and district-level goals was ambiguous at best, especially when examined from the principal's perspective. Principals were asked to describe any local or state-level policies that, in their view, had an impact on the conduct of the school reading program. A few principals indicated that district goals for reading instruction were an important component of the activities that went on in their schools.

> We have goals set up for us based on our previous reading scores in the building over a five year period --present reading level, grade equivalent levels, and what our yearly goals will be, step by step, to reach that five-year goal. (Urban principal)

Most principals, however, believed they had considerable latitude in translating district objectives into school-level practices. Two principals in the same district as the one cited above observed:

> You do get some ideas that come from the state department of education, and I know we have a supervisor of reading [who] has meetings with the reading consultants and Title I people. But I've never seen a policy which says that "You must do this" or "You can't do anything else." We have a good program which still gives you a lot of leeway.
>
> Our superintendent is such that he does not say, "You must do this." There are recommendations made and then he realizes that each school is really a school system in itself, and what problem may prevail on one side of town may not necessarily be important in another. And he more or less allows the staff, along with the principal, to make the kinds of decisions that they feel are necessary.

In view of this rather tenuous connection between the goals and objectives articulated by building- and district-level subordinates, what purposes does administrative goal articulation serve? My data indicated two important political functions of administrative goals: legitimizing intervention with subordinates, and providing common ground for administrative bargaining and persuasion. These functions were evident in the responses both of principals and district officials. Principals discussed the first of these functions--legitimizing intervention --in the context of classroom observation:

> [Our school has developed] an Improvement Plan for Instruction, which the teachers wrote, and we hope that the teachers--because each of them got a copy of that--are directing their lesson plans to [that] improvement. It's spelled out pretty explicitly, so when we go check the lesson plan, we can encourage the teachers to direct their activities to that improvement plan. (Urban principal)

> When I go to classroom observations, I have my list to make sure that the goals are being met. Now if the goals are <u>not</u> being met, the teacher comes in and tells me <u>why</u> they're not being met. Then the reading teacher, myself, and the FOCUS teacher, who also teaches reading, will sit down and think of alternative measures we can take to help bring about the learning. (Urban principal)

District officials describing principals' behavior corroborated this pattern and its legitimizing consequences:

> The principal [has to] set standards, know what he wants for the reading program in this school. If he has definite ideas, <u>then</u> he can call the reading consultant in [to take appropriate action]. (Suburban official)

They also described a similar pattern with respect to their own behavior with subordinates. One of the suburban districts had recently adopted a multi-series approach to reading instruction,

a program which included a substantial district-level effort to articulate specific instructional objectives and monitor their achievement. The district's Director of Instruction observed:

> If you have a set of objectives, and you want teachers to move through this sequence of objectives based upon your testing program, it's very difficult for a teacher to escape that. If you're testing a group of five kids, and you have a need for teaching a certain skill, and the teacher's weak in teaching that skill, that raises some havoc with the teacher. Prior to the implementation of that system, the teacher just wouldn't have bothered to teach that skill.

Not only does the establishment of objectives help to justify individual-level intervention, it also helps to justify intervention on a more collective basis. This same administrator went on to note:

> You just can't put in one of these systems without tying it to a very, very efficient and effective in-service program. We had to have in-service on some of those areas that we felt the teachers either had some liabilities or were articulating a need [for] help.

Once the basis for intervention has been established, administrators can use the goals and objectives they have articulated in their attempts to influence the choices their subordinates are making. Administrative goals become a resource in the bargaining and persuasion that characterize internal school politics. At the building level, principals can point to district goals and directives to elicit cooperation from classroom teachers:

> My very first year as a principal, there was a [teacher] who was almost ready to retire. And she did not accept the [district's] change in texts that had taken place about three years before. And rather than get worn out completely, the previous principal let this one individual go along and use this ancient, ancient series. And my reaction was, "Oh, God, we've got to do something about this!" But she was as

> stubborn as they come, and we kind of worked out a compromise where she was willing to [use the district's text] with the two top groups, but the lower groups she still felt would benefit from the older series. So it was a little bit of give and take on our parts.

This pattern of negotiation and persuasion based on system goals and objectives was even more prevalent at the district level.

> A major aspect of my job would be my being able to influence teachers, change attitudes, motivate teachers. [What have you done to accomplish that?] I've reordered our goals for the [reading] department, because this is a brand-new department. (Urban official)

> Every school [in the district] now has a planning team and writes an instructional plan of improvement. We've put into place a master plan, and I am continually talking about that master plan, everywhere I go, everything I write....And we don't back off, we keep the pressure on. We say, "You're going to write a plan of improvement. It isn't filed in a central office; <u>it is monitored</u>." The principal is partly evaluated on the degree to which he has implemented it, [and] we provide resources to follow through. (Urban official)

The existence of goals and objectives hardly guarantees that subordinates will change their behavior, or even their attitudes. But administrators who articulate goals establish a sphere of influence that encompasses administrator and subordinate alike. The legitimacy of this sphere of influence is often enhanced by attempts to involve subordinates in the initial establishment of school-wide or district-wide objectives. One suburban principal's description was typical:

> Most of our [district] directives are not just handed down; they're usually arrived at together.... We'll ask for volunteers of teachers and administrators to talk about a certain area. Then we'll come up with a joint decision, [which] will be recommended to the board of education when it involves policy or money, and they vote on it and it comes down that way.

Administrative goals, then, establish a common language for the

discussion of subordinate attitudes and behavior. They become levers administrators can use to intervene with subordinates and to attempt to influence the choices they make, particularly when the administrators can point to subordinate participation in agenda-setting and goal selection. Objectives are not orders, but rather resources for influence.

Providing Organization and Coordination

A second dimension of efficiency in administrators' perceptions of their role in reading instruction was the need to develop and maintain "organization" and "coordination." These concepts surfaced most frequently in conversations about classrooms and schools. At the classroom level, organization figured prominently in principals' discussions with teachers about reading instruction.

> Our discussions with the teachers involve mostly problems [with the] placement of kids, movement of kids from one reading group to another, changing around the reading groups, changing around the numbers of reading groups....And the reading teacher and I will sit down with the teacher and try to make some suggestions. (Urban principal)

Several principals also discussed the importance of school-wide organization, usually in programmatic terms.

> When I came here, one first grade was using an SRA basal series; somebody else was using Scott-Foresman, and the second-grade teacher was using something that didn't correlate to either of them. And upstairs they were using whatever. And the last teacher into the book room, which was usually the newest one, used a set of 1941 Ginn readers....This was what I walked into--this was a mish-mash. I had thought I was walking into a school that was well-organized and had a handle on these things.

Another principal, when asked, "What do you think your job is

with respect to reading?" responded: "Making sure there's organization and continuity--making sure there's a program."

Organization was clearly a very malleable concept for these administrators. Sometimes it meant distributing clients (overseeing classroom reading groups); sometimes it meant systematizing work (creating a schoolwide "program"); sometimes it meant planning and monitoring; but always it was treated as a positive contribution administrators could make to the business of educating. Having an "organized" classroom or school was always preferable to having a "mish-mash," irrespective of what "organization" might mean.

The same may be said of "coordination." While my respondents' perspectives on the meaning of "coordination" varied, they nevertheless affirmed its virtues--and the vices of its absence.

> When I came in [to this school], none of the things [the previous principal] said were done, had been done. Checklists weren't done--nothing was done. There was no coordination. (Urban principal)

> Having a coordinator [is important]. Teachers in the classroom, and principals, see only one perspective; they have their building, their student population. You need someone to oversee the whole thing so it's unified, that there is coordination--having adequate materials, having adequate teaching, having adequate training. (Urban official)

The need for coordination was most prominent in administrators' discussions of the relationship between classroom instruction and the supplementary services provided by district reading consultants and federally-funded Chapter 1 (then Title I) reading teachers. Administrators applauded reading specialists who "coordinated" their work with that of the classroom teacher.

> After testing everyone in the school, [the reading specialist] will take out X number of children, and work with them, based not only on what the test has told us, but what the subjective thinking of the teacher is. Then they report back [to the teacher]--they keep very close touch with each other as to the progress. Say Billy is having difficulty with initial consonants, they will work on that together. One will show the other, "This is what I'm doing for the activity," and the teacher will say, "Well, this is what I'm doing." So they both know exactly what's going on--there's coordination for the planning for Billy's reading program. (Urban principal)

> I think the biggest problem that I have, because so many of our children are receiving remediation, is that there is a [need for] collaboration and coordination. And I try to make sure that we are working with these children in a way that the classroom teacher knows that we are remediating the deficits [the children] are having in the classroom. Not my staff working in here in remediation, and the classroom teacher up here or out there, and there's no coordination. (Urban official)

This last remark, from a middle-level administrator responsible for developmental programs, points to the key political function of both coordination and organization. Supplementary sevices in reading instruction that are "coordinated" with classrooms provide an assurance of support for the classroom teacher. Principals' descriptions of classroom-specialist coordination were very clear on this matter.

> I think in some instances people thought the remedial reading people did their own little bag of tricks, that they really didn't know too much that was going on in the classroom. There is a closer tie into Holt now than there had been, and I think this is what the classroom teachers were looking for. (Urban principal)

> With any supportive service, or remedial service, offered to children, the most important aspect of that is the line of communication that has to be kept open from the classroom teacher to the specialist. The classroom teacher sends that child out and wants to know what direction [the specialist] is going in, and the specialist <u>should</u> want to know what direction [the child] is coming from, and what that classroom teacher expects. (Urban principal)

District officials concurred.

> Our remedial staff [members] are working more closely this year with the regular classroom teacher than ever before....The instruction in reading lab is almost directly keyed to the instruciton in the classroom. Before, the reading lab had their own program set up, of skills that a youngster needs, but it did not necessarily coincide with what that classroom teacher was doing. Now there's direct correlation...And in terms of how classroom teachers are perceiving the new scheduling and the new format, I would say it's very positive.

In these administrators' observations, coordination (or "communication," or "correlation") between classroom teachers and reading specialists matters because classroom teachers need to know that they are being supported. As one principal put it, "The Title I teachers are there to help the classroom teachers by giving some supportive material for those kids in her class....[The teachers] understand that this kind of personnel are there to help them do their job." What was true of special reading services was also true of "coordination" more generally: coordination is valued because it helps provide support for beleaguered subordinates, most importantly the classroom teacher.

> There are all different facets [of education], and you have to work at it in a coordinated fashion. It all goes together into a package. Otherwise it's not a system...[We need to provide] all of the things which make working conditions such that teachers are proud to work in that system...Because the teacher is the one who is on the direct firing line. (Urban official)

Whatever else "coordination" was intended to produce, it is clear that administrators promoted it in order to provide a greater sense of security in the uncertain world of classroom teaching (Lieberman and Miller, 1978). Not only was help made available to the classroom teacher, it was made available <u>on the teacher's</u>

terms. Certainly there was an implicit assumption that coordination benfits children, but the discussions that mentioned coordination focused explictly on its benefits for classroom teachers.

Organization serves a similar purpose.. Administrators' perceptions of organization center primarily on the benefits of good organization for educators rather than for their "clients." This was most apparent at the classroom level, where principals pointed to the need to organize children into reading groups that were "manageable" for the teachers.

> Teachers want to have classes divided into groups which are efficient and manageable, so that the classes are workable. This is the biggest problem in their attempt to individualize--there can be a large number of children as well as a large number of reading groups. (Suburban principal)

> [My job] starts with the organization, getting children into the proper groups, and once the children are into groups, giving the teachers a load that can be handled easily. [We work on] grouping the children so there aren't four or five reading groups, which a teacher can't handle. Most of our teachers deal with two reading groups, one high and one low--[we are] trying to maintain that. (Urban principal)

It was also apparent at the building level. Principals discussed school-wide organinazation less frequently than classroom-level arrangements, but when they did, they discussed it in terms of supporting their subordinates. The urban principal who had initiated a standardized curriculum in his school, said that he had done so primarily in response to teacher dissatisfaction:

> Really, the reason I made the changes is because the teachers complained to me. Some of the better teachers came to me, once they got to know me after awhile.

Often school-wide organization simply means having all the pieces in place to provide additional help beyond the classroom.

> [When children are experiencing difficulty], at some point we look into other resources. For example, there is a transitional class between the kindergarten and first grade for children who just need more time. We also have a teacher who is a specialist in learning disabilities....There is also the school reading consultant, and an additional Instructionl Clinic with a teacher who can work intensively with one child three or four times a week. (Suburban principal)

Organization becomes an important political resource when outside specialists demonstrate support for classroom teachers in their work with the children. As this same principal went on to observe:

> It can be a problem if the rapport is not there. If a teacher feels she's being surpervised, a snag in the working relationship can develop.

A district administrator responsible for supervising reading consultants concurred; furthermore, she explicitly encouraged those she supervised to recognize the importance of supportiveness in their daily contacts with teachers.

> I think any support service people have a particular set of pressures and strains because you're dependent on a good working relationship with everyone. [They need] the ability to work with people, to approach them in a non-threatening way, to share the responsibility. [So] I try to emphasize with [the reading consultants] that we're in a supportive role; we're not in a role where you can close your classroom door or whatever.

Both organization and coordination, then, are treated as administrative tools to assist subordinates, predominantly classroom teachers. Put somewhat differently, efficiency-related concepts of organization and coordination serve political as well as managerial ends. Providing support for subordinates "on the firing line" is a crucial element in legitimizing the

administrator's presence and role in the educational system, a presence and role which is not always clear--not just to others in the school system, but to the administrators themselves (Costa and Guditis, 1984). For example, when I asked an urban elementary supervisor to explain how his job affects the reading program, he replied:

> I'm not sure. Perhaps as a supervisor, working with teachers....I guess it's to monitor the program, and maybe just be a supervisor and augment the reading program in any way that it needs to be.

Despite such vagueness and uncertainty, administrators who "organize" and "coordinate" can point to the benefits of these activities for their subordinates--and that is far easier to document then benefits for students. A Director of Early Childhood Programs, responsible for supervising curriculum specialists, drew the most explicit connection between organized services and administrative legitimacy.

> I cannot maximze the importance [of the curriculum specialists]--they really, really are crucial. We're going through another round of budget cuts, and it's easy for people at the top--my boss, for instance--to say, "Look, there are these people out there that do nothing but float around the city and spend time in classrooms; they don't give direct services to kids, and therefore it's easier to cut them." And I'm saying, "No, they're crucial to what's going on in classroom"....I was a classroom teacher--I know how hard it is to be in that classroom eight hours a day, with kids that are bouncing off the wall. I know it's rough--so I think the teachers not only have to feel the pressure of doing a good job, they [also] have to feel the positive reinforcement of these people coming around and...giving ideas, and actually going out and getting the books or filmstrips or whatever, that the teachers didn't have time to do.

This is not to say that my sample of administrators was unaware that organization and coordination have consequences for

the effectiveness of the services children receive as well as for the efficiency with which those services are delivered. It is to say, however, that the educational considerations were subordinated to the political ones.

Acquiring Information

The availability of appropriate information for analysis and decision making has long been associated with governmental efficiency; indeed, demands for reform almost always include demands to improve the quality, quantity, and accessibility of "hard data." In 1984, a report from the President's Private Sector Survey on Cost Control asserted, "The absence of the right information, at the right time, in the right amounts, to make the right decision, renders the government incapable of effectively assessing its strengths and weaknesses and achieving any reasonable degree of managerial efficiency" (Downs and Larkey, 1986). The educational administrators I interviewed would have given wholehearted assent to this claim. But at the same time, many also would have pointed to the overwhelming uncertainty that characterizes the business of educating, an uncertainty that affects the way everyone in the schools approaches his or her tasks. As a result of this paradox, it is easier to see political rather than educational benefits in the administrator's use of information.

A number of the administrators in my sample expressed an awareness of the uncertain connections between educational processes and outcomes, both inside and outside the classroom. Classroom ambiguity featured prominently in several

administrators' descriptions of school reading programs.

> Teaching reading is such a complex skill. We just don't know why some things work and why others don't. One teacher said that for some kids, she thinks she could stand on her head and speak Swahili, and they would still learn to read. (Suburban principal)

> Every skill that's ever given in reading is given in the classroom. Why some children don't get certain skills--I don't know, to tell you the truth. I don't think anybody knows; we just wish we knew. That way we could implant in them that lack. (Suburban official)

The uncertainty characterizing the teacher's job was paralleled by a similar uncertainty characterizing administrative efforts. One administrator had recently instituted a number of programmatic and procedural changes in the district's reading program, and pointed with pride to an improvement in citywide reading scores. When I asked her which of the changes she had instituted were responsible for this improvement, she replied:

> I <u>don't</u> know; I'm doing multiple things, because I'm trying to raise the consciousness of teachers [and] the awareness of principals. You do a lot of things, just to initiate change.

Despite this uncertainty--or, more likely, because of it--the administrators in my sample were more likely than anyone else in the schools to point to the value of information in making decisions at all levels. For the most part, they focused on two kinds of information: professional educational research, and test results. The former tended to be the domain of district-level administrators, while the latter was referred to by almost every administrator I interviewed.

References by district officials to published research were vague but respectful. Sometimes their remarks focused on the classroom level:

> Some [researchers] say the look-say method [is better], some say the phonetic method. There have been many studies; I think the Carnegie study by Chall is an example of what I was talking about. (Suburban official)

> I happen to be a great believer in the model of Ron Edmonds and Jim Comer and others; I'm totally opposed to the philosophy of Jencks and Coleman, which states that if you understand the child's background and his home environment or social class standing, you can predict academic success. I don't believe that....With Coleman and Jencks, you cause many teachers, if they accept that philosophy, to have very low expectations for kids....I'm always reminded of Pygmalion in the classroom, the study Jacobsen and Rosenthal did on the self-fulfilling prophecy. (Urban official)

Other references involved school-wide programs or practices.

> If you look back and find the Rand report, which came out a couple of months ago, they have done an evaluation of Title I. Title I programs are only effective...[when they are used] to support, not supplant, what is happening in the classroom. (Urban official)

> I'm intrigued by this book I'm reading on Theory Z -- his whole concept is that you can't isolate what the teacher in grade five does from what the teacher in grade three is doing. (Urban official)

Research, for these administrators, had a prima facie credibility. Even when they rejected it, as did the urban official in his response to Jencks and Coleman, they did so because they didn't like its implications, not because they questioned its validity, reliability, or generalizability. The result is similar to what we have seen with respect to organization and coordination. Research provides information, and information is a positive good administrators can contribute to the business of education. And they did--through in-service workshops, newsletters, and direct contact with subordinates.

> Under the leadership of the supervisor of elementary education and the superintendent, we are trying to in-

> service our principals and...make them realize, "You are responsible for the education of six hundred children; that's your number one priority. Do you know the curriculum guide? Do you know what the reading objectives are? Do you know how to transition a child from bilingual education?" (Urban official)

> For almost three years, I've been working very conscientiously, trying to implement the model....that Edmonds and Comer talk about. Our latest newsletter is devoted totally to what we've done in [the district], where I've actually taken the characteristics of instructionally effective schools, and I list all the [district] initiatives that have taken place in the last three years, and where they fall in the plane of instructional effectiveness. For example, testing programs: One of the criteria for instructionally effective schools is that you have an objective data base by which you can assess what the hell you're doing. And we list that [in our newsletter], we show where it falls on the plane. (Urban official)

The observations of this last respondent are particularly compelling. In his communication with subordinates, he offers a potent blend of professional research and "objective data" to support the initiatives his administration has urged upon the district. While his familiarity with the literature and the explicit connections he drew between research findings, district activities, and test results were unusual, the characterization of test results as "objective data" was not. If there was a single common denominator in the responses of my sample of administrators, it was the importance they attached to achievement test scores. Some administrators focused on the classroom level.

> In our system, the classroom teacher and the reading consultant, based on the child's identified needs, will select the appropriate text for each child. That involves a pretest to identify the skills the child doesn't have; then the child is instructed in the skills he hasn't mastered; and then there is a posttest. If the posttest shows that some skills have been mastered, and others haven't, then the child will

> advance in the areas mastered, and be re-instructed in the skills he hasn't mastered until his tests show that he's ready to go on in those areas. (Suburban principal)

> I keep track of all the reading scores. They can be reduced to one note-book, and I can see [what the needs are], because the testing from Holt is criterion-referenced, so you're not looking for 100%. So if I see a child is making 100 on every one of the Holt [tests], then possibly he needs to have a different text so he can be regrouped and go faster. (Urban principal)

Others discussed school-wide results.

> As a principal you have to weigh very heavily...the standardized testing at the end of the year, which gives you an inclination as to the progress that's been made. (Urban principal)

> Each school is now developing an individual inventory of goals that they plan to cover for the year, and they're stressing the areas of major weakness for the kids,...based on the deficiencies as shown on the Base 3 test, the Base 6 test, and the Iowa [test]. They're analyzing the test results very, very carefully. (Urban official)

Still others pointed to district achievement scores.

> Our statistics show that we are coming up to where we should be on grade level. A year ago, before we instituted the host program, children were reading below grade level by a large percentage. Now we are coming up to where we should be. (Urban official)

Concern with test results, then, pervaded administrative discussions of school reading programs. At all of these levels, administrators relied on test results for three central purposes: (1) to serve as a guide to decision making for a particular student, class, or school; (2) to legitimize intervention with subordinates; and (3) to justify the continuation of ongoing programs and practices. All of these functions are as much political as educational, in that they provide an "objective" rationale for the administrator's activities. Administrators

relied on test results, for example, to provide guidance in matters of classroom grouping, the acquisition of materials, or the provision of special services in reading.

> At the beginning of the year, we take the children in second and third grade, and they're given tests. Then, to select kids for reading lab, [the reading consultants] would go through the MAT scores from last year,...and then give their own series of tests in order to make their groups, [which are] based on identified skills needs. (Urban principal)

> We have a Planning and Placement Team, which...consists of the social worker, the principal, the reading teacher, the learning disability teacher, and the unit leaders. Depending on the child under discussion, the child's teacher and parents can also meet with the core group. The EERA testing supplements the information available to them. (Suburban principal)

These administrators portrayed test results as a kind of compass, indicating the right direction for individual children, classrooms, or entire schools. No administrator treated tests as the sole basis of decision; the judgments and observations of teachers, specialists, and principals also played a role, depending on the kind of decision being made. But tests were almost always the point of departure.

My interpretation of this pattern is that reliance on tests provided a form of support for clasroom teachers. For one thing, tests conferred "objectivity" and clarity on the often mysterious and uncertain choices teachers confront, particularly when the testing was part of a larger, coherent approach to reading instruction.

> The expectation [with the Holt series] is that children would make a year's progress in a year's time....The testing is the important thing with teachers; it's very diagnostic, so that they could pinpoint where the difficulty is for youngsters, and they have materials to use with them. (Urban principal)

For another, tests could be used to justify a teacher's choices to parents raising questions about a child's progress or the instruction she had received.

> We've encouraged all of the parents to ask to see the Holt scores....They are beginning to ask very intelligent questions about the report cards; they want to see the Metropolitan [test] results.... Parents were very supportive; they don't want their child to pass on if they haven't mastered the work that is expected of them. (Urban principal)

This is not to say that tests were used <u>only</u> to inform and support teacher's choices. On the contrary, test results were also used to justify administrative intervention with subordinates, principals as well as teachers. This somewhat paradoxical pattern--using test results both to defend and to criticize subordinates--can be attributed to the autonomy with which most people in schools do their work. On the one hand, as many of my respondents put it, teachers in particular are "on the firing line" behind the closed door of the classroom, and need all the support and protection the system can afford them. At the same time, however, the closed classroom door requires administrators to knock before entering. And they can use test results in seeking to gain admission.

> We do print-outs [of test results], and when the reading teachers gets them, she brings them to me, and...at a glance we can see how every kid is doing and every group is doing. So I know whether [the teachers] are doing a good job or not....If I spot a problem, I say [to the reading teachers], "Go up and observe so-and-so"....So the reading teacher will go up, and most of the time she confirms my suspicions, and I say, "Okay, when you get a chance, work with her." (Urban principal)

> If a principal, by virtue of daily contact and...an analysis of test scores, can determine that Mrs. Smith consistently doesn't get the results that she should,

> and not enough is going on,...you're going to say, "Hey, let's talk seriously about what you're doing and what you're not doing, and these are some things that I see that we're going to talk about." (Suburban district official)

Test results can also be used to justify intervention with principals.

> Every year, we're going to be sitting down with the principals and looking at the [Iowa test] scores this year and the scores next year--"Where were you? Where have you come?" No one is suggesting that if you haven't moved your school from X to Y, you're going to be removed. But we are suggesting that if you haven't moved your school from X to Y, then [we will ask] "What are the problems? How can we help you? What kind of support services do you need?" With the full understanding that there's a limit to how many years we're going to be able to do that until someone begins to ask [if] the problem is with the leadership in the school. (Urban official)

> We have a levels program, and [the tests] are machine-scored by CES. And I get a copy of the district summary twice a year. And I can go through it very quickly and find out where our weak spots are. I can use that as a tool to contact the building principal, to ask if there's an explanation for the deficiency in a particular aspect of the reading program. [I can also use] the standardized testing we do once a year. (Urban official)

Intervention is not the same as transformation; as I will argue in the next section, intervention was more likely to result in bargains and compromises than in orders and mandates. But justified intervention did open up the possibility of change, despite the autonomy that characterizes the educational profession.

A final function of "objective" test information, again standing in some contrast to the preceding function, is the justification of present programs and practices in reading instruction. This usually involved the straightforward assertion

of a casual relationship between a recent innovation and an improvement in reading scores.

> One of the weaknesses I've found in [our reading series] is that... it does not give the teacher directions [for asking] questions before and after silent reading...Children are now doing that, through the newsletter, through my talks with principals, through inservice, it's being done now. And the effect is that, the eighth grade scores just came out, and...for seven months' instruction, the children have made almost two years growth. (Urban official)

> [District] test scores have been improving because we've made a strong emphasis on reading in the past several years. [Interviewer: What has been done?] Workshops for teachers; more time spent with reading; great emphasis on the first grade teachers; a greater awareness by central office staff at meetings [of] the importance of reading. [Interviewer: Do you know what effect this has had on what actually happens in the classroom?] A greater awareness of reading...But I don't know if there were any actual changes. (Urban district official)

Administrators pointed to test scores even when the causal connections they were asserting were tenuous. In one of the suburban districts, for example, the role of reading consultants had shifted from an emphasis on working with students to an emphasis on working with teachers. I asked their district supervisor whether the consultants were more effective in their new role than in their old one. She responded:

> We know...how effective the program is by the standardized testing that's done...We [also] have the grade nine proficiency test which are mandated by the state, and we only had three [students] last year, out of four hundred, who did not pass that standard. Last year was the first time that test was done. We would assume that if we did not have the reading consultants....that testing situation wouldn't have been exactly the same.

In the urban district that had been emphasizing "instructionally effective schools," I asked the superintendent to describe how

this emphasis was affecting people's behavior. He replied:

> In an objective sense, I'm pleased to note that in the last two years, the Iowa test scores have improved. [Interviewer: How do you know that that's the result of the changed attitudes you've been promoting?] It's hard. I--I--okay. The problem I have is that [the district] has never had a comprehensive program that I can speak of. So I have nothing to compare it with. I can only say that we've given the test for three years, and in the last three years the scores have at least moved forward.

These last observations are perhaps the clearest examples of the political consequences of "hard data." In a world of uncertainty and ambiguity, where it is difficult to draw reliable connections between what school people do and what children learn, indicators of success are in short supply. Despite their acknowledgements of uncertainty both in and out of the classroom, my sample of administrators never questioned the reliability or generalizability of the data they were collecting. They simply set to one side their awareness that schools were messy, complicated places, and ascribed a kind of certainty to test results that they never would have ascribed to the contexts in which those results were produced. The kind of information on which they relied permitted administrators to maintain a semblance of internal accountability, even in the face of pervasive ambiguity and subordinate autonomy. They could use test scores to hold subordinates accountable, while at the same time demonstrating their own accountability for their initiatives and activities to their subordinates. Test scores were also useful in maintaining external accountability to parents, the media, and city officials. By their own admission, the "objective" information administrators had was not always useful

educationally; but it was very useful politically.

Evaluating Performance

A final dimension of efficiency for which administrators were responsible was the evaluation of subordinate performance (Callahan, 1962; Downs and Larkey, 1986). Once goals have been established, services have been organized and coordinated, and information has been collected, administrators are in a position to examine how well their subordinates have played the hands they have been dealt. And the pattern here, as elsewhere, is that the administrator's approach to evaluation has more to do with school politics than with "productivity" or "performance." This is true in two respects: first, in the way administrators conduct and interpret evaluations, and second, in their transactions with subordinates after an evaluation has been completed.

Several administrators described features of the evaluation process that were intended to help minimize the subordinate's sense of vulnerability. For example, pre-evaluation conference between prinicpals and classroom teachers helps the teachers to exert some control over the evaluation criteria the principals use.

> This year, there is more stress on the pre-conference between the principal and teacher, so the teacher has a more participatory role. For example, just yesterday I visited a fourth-grade classroom, and the teacher asked me to observe as she worked on improving the level of comprehension in her low group. (Suburban principal)

Even where pre-conferencing was not emphasized, administrators recognized the stressful nature of evaluation.

[Evaluation] is kind of frightening--it was for me,

> too, when I was a teacher. It would be. Just having somebody visit. But you try to make them comfortable with it. That's why I go in on an informal basis. (Surban district official)

The administrators' awareness of the meaning of evaluation for subordinates influenced the way they interpreted what they saw in schools and classrooms. This was particularly true for principals:

> I don't go in with a stopwatch, because...there's a lot of things that might interfere with time on task....If a teacher has scheduled, say, 50 minutes of reading with a particular group, she [may] use 20 minutes of that time to settle a problem, or some parent will pop their head in and want to discuss something. But if you determine time on task, you [only] spent 20 minutes on reading. (Urban principal)

> I never like to judge anything [in the classroom] until I know exactly what is going on. Because sometimes, you could misinterpret what you're hearing. So if I see something that might arouse my curiosity as to what is going on, then I will sit down with the teacher and ask for an explanation--"What were you trying to accomplish?" Because many times you walk in for a classroom observation--which is unannounced, by the way --you might be in the middle of a lesson, so you don't fully grasp what is going on in the classroom academically or socially. (Urban principal)

District administrators who were responsible for evaluating school administrators expressed a similar awareness of the pressures principals face, and that affected their interpretation of principals' performance.

> I spent fifteen minutes on the phone with a principal who was concerned about a false rumor about a youngster being stabbed yesterday. It didn't happen, but he's concerned, he has the police in the building--this type of thing. How much time is this guy going to spend on reading instruction? (Urban official)

> Our principals now have very, very little time to spend with instruction...They're so bogged down in required paperwork,...doing evaluations of teachers, and reports that are due in here--they're so bogged down they just don't have the time. (Urban official)

A familiar pattern is beginning to emerge. Evaluations are in principle intended to discriminate between satisfactory and unsatisfactory performance, and to promote necessary adjustments in the case of the latter so that organizational goals and objectives can be met more quickly and at lower cost (Downs and Larkey, 1986). These purposes are blunted, however, by the administrator's commitment to making evaluation as non-threatening as possible. As one district official put it, "I think we really have to get into principals' heads, that their job really is to help teachers, that evaluation is not a punitive process." Evaluation simply becomes another avenue by which administrators can offer support to their subordinates. By far the most powerful statement to this effect came from an urban principal:

> The principal's got to be aware that the teacher's job is a very, very difficult one, a very frustrating one, a very tiring one. So that our approach with the teachers has to be a positive approach. Even if the teacher is doing something that is not right educationally for the kids....So what I try to do first of all is to understand the teacher's plight.

The administrator's attitude of supportiveness carries over into the post-evaluation period, particularly in cases where a need for some kind of change is evident in the evaluation. School and district administrators alike indicated that their transactions with subordinates following an evaluation were characterized not by mandates and directives, but by persuasion and compromise. Both kinds of transactions were conditioned by the administrator's awareness of subordinate vulnerability.

> I think my first year I came on a little bit too strong and put people on the defensive. I had a superior who said, "Don't back them into a corner because then they'll spring." So you really have to look for a positive side, and you'll find it most places. There's far more good going on, and you work at that first, and then you say, "Would you be willing to try this?" (Suburban principal)

> One of the things I've attempted to do is to cause principals to look inwards. If I beat on someone's head...I will call the guy in [and ask him], "What indications do you have that things are happening the way you want them to happen?" The reason for doing this is to get this guy to see that he <u>can</u> be successful, and that he holds a high level of expectation, not only for his kids, but for his staff; and if he isn't holding those high expectation levels, to try to convince him that he ought to....It is primarily a thing of instilling confidence into individuals....Because over the years we have taken that confidence away. We have taken away the [principal's] belief that something can happen as a result of their intervention. (Urban official)

In the bargains administrators struck with their subordinates, they relied on many of the efficiency features described above to enhance their credibility This strategy made administrative goals, organization, and information even more politically useful. One district official, for example, suggested that principals bargain with teachers over the goals they attempt to reach.

> If [teachers] are not meeting their goals and objectives, [principals] are supposed to sit with the teacher and ask them, "What's the problem?" And if [the teacher] is facing a situation that would prevent them from reaching this [goal], that they had not anticipated, [then the principal would say,] "All right, we'll rewrite this [goal], see how this goal looks--can you reach this now?"

Another official described how principals can blend the goals they have established with the information they have acquired in negotiating with teachers following an evaluation.

> When I sit down [after] an evaluation, I should tell Mrs. Jones that she can give me more than five months' [progress in reading]. She can say to me, "Jorge, I would have given you more, but remember, you gave me 28 kids, and I wound up with 20 new ones by April. I didn't have the same kids"--"Okay, I can buy that, Mrs. Jones; let's see what I can do next year. Next year, I'm going to try to give you 28 [kids], and I'm going to try not to put more kids in your classroom, and I'm going to see if you can grow up to twelve months, which is what your colleague did up on the third floor." I think there are ways, if you have a handle on testing [and] curriculum. If you don't have a handle on the educational growth of your building, then forget it.

Principals can also draw on organizational resources in their transactions with teachers, bearing in mind the need to "coordinate" whatever additional services are provided with what the teacher is already doing.

> The basic, bottom line, is that before you terminate anybody, you should try to provide as much support as possible to the person, to help them become better at what they're doing, or to correct whatever they're deficient in...You have to notify them in writing of what the deficiency is; you have to offer support, bring in resource people,...give them a follow-up, etc....Everybody needs some help in the classroom; the hardest job in any school system is in the classroom. And therefore all the help, support, assistance that can be brought to that person in the classroom is where it all begins and ends. (Urban official)

Evaluation, then, is eminently consistent with the other efficiency dimensions of objectives, organization, and information. But the administrators in my sample were more likely to use evaluation as a political opportunity to gain the confidence of their subordinates, than as a managerial opportunity to promote change. In developing criteria for evaluation, in interpreting their subordinates' behavior, and in their transactions with subordinates following an evaluation, these administrators expressed a reluctance for using evaluation

procedures to regulate their subordinates' behavior. And this is a well-founded reluctance, given the ambiguity, autonomy, and vulnerability that characterize school politics. Asked what a principal could do to help change the behavior of teachers who needed to improve but who did not deserve to be fired, one district official responded simply, "You punt!" Evaluation is one way to do that.

The Politics of Efficiency and Equal Educational Opportunity

> A lot of what I have to think about is how we set up schools in monetary factors. We're dictated to, how much money we can have to run the school system. I may have wanted, let's say, a couple more reading readiness programs....[or] some more pre-K [classes]....But the way the budget is coming down from Title I, I can't do this. I may even have to cut back on some Title I services next year, because of budgetary factors. [Interviewer: How do you decide where to cut back?] Where the programs will hurt the least. Where it will hurt the children the least, not the programs. I try to think of the children, but I have to think of money. (Suburban official)

Of course, we might say. Someone in the schools has to think about money. Someone has to pay attention to the machinery of schooling, making sure educators have what they need to do their jobs, even in the face of budgetary shortfalls. More important, someone has to provide meaningful support for people in the schools, especially for classroom teachers, who were described time and again as being "in the trenches" and "on the firing line." They need professional and personal support simply to survive the daily maneuvers of life in classrooms, and my sample of administrators believed their job was to provide it.

The politics of efficiency helps to mitigate not only the problem of declining resources, but also problems of ambiguity, autonomy, and vulnerability that everyone in the schools has to face.

But everything comes with a price tag, and efficiency is no exception. In attending to the four dimensions of efficiency described above, the administrators in my sample treated organizational maintenance as the equivalent of educational effectiveness. When confronted with children who were not achieving as expected in the classroom setting, administrators set goals, coordinated services, acquired information, conducted evaluations--and considered the problem solved. All of these efficiency-related activities helped maintain the organizational life of the school or district; but administrators also relied on them as indicators of institutional effectiveness. This pattern, as I will suggest below, helps to preserve educational structures and processes which constrain the opportunities available to low-income and minority children.

The analysis offered here differs from the usual criticism of educational administration, which is that administrators are so busy administering, they have no time to pay attention to education. Indeed, administrators themselves think that lack of time is the issue. As one official put it:

> A principal's got to deal with some of the crappy details. He's got to deal with the cleanliness of the building, he's got to deal with the fire drill reports, he's got to deal with whether or not the sidewalk is shoveled and sanded, he's got to deal with whether the roof leaks, he's got to deal with Mrs. Jones who wants to come in and crack somebody's skull. He can't always be an instructional leader if he's got to fulfill all of these other tasks.

My argument here is a different one. The administrators in my sample were as harried and hounded as the hypothetical principal described above, and they worried about their distance from the classroom experience. But this did not prevent them from paying attention to education. On the contrary, the politics of efficiency re-connected them to classrooms and provided them with a ready-made educational agenda, one which required them to respond to issues of educational effectiveness in terms of organizational maintenance. More specifically, administrators who used the tenets of efficiency as resources in the internal politics of the public school interpreted the needs of students in terms of the needs of their teachers. This strategy helped to enhance the administrator's legitimacy and, occasionally, his or her influence, by providing much-needed support to beleaguered subordinates. But it also left intact most classroom processes, including those which disadvantage low-income and minority students.

In their discussion of school reading programs, my sample of administrators provided evidence for this conclusion in all four dimensions of efficiency. With respect to the first, the articulation of program goals, we have already seen how administrators would on occasion adjust system objectives to suit the preferences and practices of their subordinates. Sometimes this would occur during the initial establishment of individual or collective goals, when administrators would encourage their subordinates to participate in the process of selection and articulation. Sometimes it would occur as a result of feedback

during evaluation procedures. In either case, subordinates' preferences dominated the way goals were discussed and established. Furthermore, teachers and principals, like all "street-level bureaucrats" (Lipsky, 1980), retained substantial discretion in the ways they interpreted and implemented administrative goals. The impact of administrative objectives on subordinate behavior was dependent, not on the authority of the administrator to establish and enforce such objectives, but on the success of the administrator in bargaining with and persuading subordinates.

The need to support subordinates and to maintain room to maneuver in negotiating with them may also affect the content of the goals administrators actually articulate. During the 37 interviews I conducted with school and district administrators, not a single respondent mentioned "equality" or "equal opportunity" as an objective of the school's reading program. Instead, they discussed having sufficient programs and services available to students at all "levels" of ability. Remarks such as the following were typical.

> I expect for these children to work up to their level....And if there's some problem, why this child can't read up to their level, let's work with this child, have this child tested, have people to come in and work with this child, and see why this child isn't on their level. (Urban principal)

> I think we're paying more attention than ever in public education to the differences in kids. There are gifted and talented programs almost everyplace; there are special ed programs, addressing handicapped and retarded and educable and trainable and just every category of disability....I think what public educators do is the most good for the most kids. (Suburban official)

Notice that the objectives alluded to in these administrators' perspectives emphasize the processes of schooling, rather than its outcomes. This was the case in most discussions of administrative goals. Given the political function of goals and objectives as resources for bargaining and persuasion, this should not be surprising. It is much easier to negotiate about the services schools should provide than about the results students should achieve, especially in view of the ambiguities of classroom life. There are too many uncontrollable factors to which teachers and principals can legitimately point in explaining why a particular student, class, or school has not experienced a particular kind of outcome; administrators who specify desired achievement levels are likely to lose their credibility and hence their bargaining power with their subordinates. On those rare occasions when my sample of administrators did discuss educational outcomes, the outcomes they discussed were so vague that it would have been virtually impossible to distinguish between those subordinates who were achieving them and those who were not. How can an administrator "prove" that a particular child or classroom is, or is not, "reading up to their level"? The irony, of course, is that classic efficiency notions would seem to require administrators to emphasize precisely those kinds of objectives they were least likely to emphasize--outcomes, and not simply procedures. Such an emphasis, however, would undercut administrators' efforts to provide support for their subordinates and legitimacy for themselves. In short, the politics of efficiency makes it easier

to ignore persistent patterns of failure in specific subgroups of the student population. So long as procedural objectives are being attained, educational objectives can be safely set aside.

Strategies for organizing and coordinating reinforced administrative inclinations to focus on on means instead of ends, to the detriment of disadvantaged students. In fact, the particular forms of organization and coordination that many administrators emphasized helped to maintain educational structures that actually limited the opportunities available to low income and minority students. One example is classroom ability grouping. Over and over again, administrators relied on this organizational device to solve educational or instructional problems.

> If I see a child is continually struggling, there are two reasons for struggling. Either he needs more help than we're giving him, or the pacing is too fast and he needs to be re-grouped. Sometimes he can stay with his group if we supplement it with remedial reading. (Urban principal)

> Our reading program is a levels program, and if a youngster needs to be in a certain level, we have the components of the program to plug him in where he needs....We have placement tests, and the youngster is plugged in to whatever component of the series he needs to be in. (Urban official)

Differences among children--a serious educational problem--were "solved" either by shifting their classroom organizational context (i.e. moving them into a different reading group) or by providing them with resources outside of (but "coordinated with") classrooms. Both these patterns, as we have seen, served some important political functions in providing support for teachers and principals. People in schools not only need to be supported

--they also need to know that they are being supported. In providing organization and coordination, administrators paid explicit attention to their subordinates' personal needs as well as their professional ones. When I asked my sample of administrators to explain why they emphasized coordination between special reading services and classroom instruction, most of them responded as follows:

> The teacher, I think, is in the best position to know the children. She works with the kids every single day, and you have to respect the teacher. You also have to realize that if the morale of the teacher is high, I think her or his performance will be better. So what you try to do is, just as you do with children, boost and develop the ego, and make the teacher feel good about himself or herself. If I say to you, "You're doing a fabulous job; I like that lesson very much; keep up the good work," you'll feel good. (Urban official)

Elsewhere I have suggested (Fraatz, 1987) that some of the organizational structures and coordinative procedures administrators support may work to the disadvantage of low-income and minority students. Ability grouping, for example, has been criticized for providing fewer learning opportunities for children in lower level groups (disproportionately populated by poor and minority students) than for children in higher level groups.<4> And remedial reading services may be criticized for providing "more of the same" in the learning opportunities they offer disadvantaged children, precisely because of the valiant effort to "coordinate" them with classroom instruction. Most administrators were hard-pressed to describe clearly how supplementry reading instruction expanded the opportunities available to students receiving services.

> By having the reading teacher zero in on the skills that the kids need in a classroom, I think that will be very helpful. They use the same materials, usually. They use a variety of other materials, because you don't want to give the child something he or she associates failure with. [Interviewer: But if they're using similar materials--] It's not similar. They're using different materials, they're using booklets, kits, that they're not usually exposed to. It may be the same skill, but a different bit of material. (Urban official)

Here again, the politics of efficiency requires administrators to focus on school processes rather than school outcomes. Their responsibility, as they understood it, was to make sure the services were available and integrated with the classroom program of instruction; they simply assumed that results would follow.

In their effort to support subordinates in this fashion, the administrators in my sample came to see existing arganizational arrangements as immutable. Alternative approaches to organizing for reading instruction were generally dismissed out of hand.

> My experience tells me that for a whole lot of years, with a whole lot of very intelligent and dedicated people, the classroom setting has been in existence. And if it could be improved upon somebody at some point in time would have done that. (Suburban official)

When I pointed out that even after receiving additional services, low-income and minority students still remained on the lower end of most achievement distributions, they generally responded as follows:

> How could you give an explanation for that kind of pattern? If [the children] had not been provided the services that they <u>did</u> get, they would be lower, perhaps. So I think that's an unfair question even to ask. Unless you're going to make a comparison with where they were and where they have gone. Because they came with less. (Urban official)

> I think a lot of students that are in these [economically disadvantaged] areas really are learning

> disabled kids, and they might always be low, but without this extra help they'd be a lot lower--a lot lower. I don't think it's heredity, I think it's environment. (Urban official)

The need to maintain existing organizational arrangements thus takes precedence over the need to address educational problems these arrangements seem incapable of remedying. And it is the politics of efficiency which keep organizational maintenance in the forefront of the administrator's educational agenda.

Information and evaluation, the last two planks of the efficiency platform, also fix the administrator's attention on school processes instead of outcomes. There is a special irony in this conclusion, because test scores and classroom observations are clearly intended to serve as indicators of performance or "productivity," not simply procedures. Yet the foregoing analysis suggests that both dimensions of efficiency are likely to be used either to justify existing practices ("Our test scores have been going up all over the city!") or to legitimize administrative interventions which, with few exceptions, will alter only slightly the instrucional resources and services children are provided. Principals generally spoke of testing and evaluation in terms of maintaining existing arrangements and procedures in the classroom.

> The classroom teacher, I'm sure, has made provision for individual differences, and individuals will fall in the low level of the structure. But they're also picked up by our Title I people, and if it's proven that there are other deficiencies, through testing or whatever, we have many, many special programs, and where the child would fit, the service is definitely there. (Suburban official)

> As soon as you walk into a classroom,...you can see that the teachers are progressing with lesson plans,

> because you can see there's follow-up on the things that need to be done....But I would hate to get to the point where I would destroy the style of a person. If I go in to look at a lesson plan, and it says you're teaching social studies, and the teacher drops that to help a child because of a particular thing that comes up--I think a lot of that is very good. (Urban principal)

District officials treated test scores and evaluations the same way.

> I monitor, formally and informally, our teacher evaluation program....What I had to do was an efficiency check, to make sure that people were in their right cycle, that they had been observed, that they had been pre-conferenced, that they had been post-conferenced, that the performance objectives were in place for this year--things of that nature. (Urban official)

Evaluations were only rarely treated as a warrant for intervention, and when they were, the interventions resulted in bargains and persuasive efforts that left ongoing practices intact. As this official went on to say:

> Very, very frankly, you hope that you have the trust and confidence of [the principals], so that when they complete a self-analysis of where they are in terms of the teacher evaluation program, if there are any discrepancies in terms of what they are producing for me, I sit down with them and we talk about why. And in some cases they're justified.

"Objective information" was equally unlikely to provoke attempts at significant change. None of the administrators pointed to current test results as indicative of a need for future changes; they were only used to demonstrate the merits of current school or district initiatives. In short, my respondents provided ample evidence for Clark and McKibbin's claim that "evaluation is a systematic method for schools to sort out what they have done, decide what they do well and enjoy doing, and rationalize

continuing to do it" (1982, p. 671).

If this is a true claim--and my interviews with administrators suggests that it is--then we cannot look to efficiency techniques like these to solve problems in educational outcomes. Historically, schools have not done well in their attempts to equalize educational opportunities for poor and minority students. And with their limited resources, school systems which use evaluative and informative procedures to "rationalize" making choices which play to their strengths will never have sufficient resources left over to address their weaknesses. If efficiency means "maximizing the use of available resources," then efficiency aphorisms will always and inevitably cause administrators to turn aside from the problem of inequality. They will continue to use information and evaluation procedures to support most of what their subordinates are already doing, identifying only those problems which can be solved with minimal alterations in school practices and programs.

The politics of efficiency serves some valuable purposes in the public schools. It keeps administrators far more closely connected to what goes on in classrooms than most critics of educational administration would suspect. It provides embattled classroom teachers with a sense that they are understood and appreciated by their adult colleagues, and it gives them needed support when they encounter external criticism or internal crisis. It provides opportunities for educators to talk to each other about what they are doing and why, and where they would like to focus their energies in the months to come. And it

provides a way to identify and respond to the occasional teacher or principal who needs to make a career change. All of these are important contributions "efficient" administrators can make to the business of schooling. But in making them, administrators are prevented from making other contributions, contributions which could begin to address the persistent problems experienced by low income and minority children in the schools. Organizational maintenance and subordinate support keep equality issues off the administrator's educational agenda. And until the fundamental conditions of internal school politics are disrupted, educational administrators will continue to pursue efficiency at the expense of equality.

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ENDNOTES

1. I wish I could take credit for the use of this quote here, but I can't. Credit is due to George W. Downs and Patrick D. Larkey (1986), in their insightful book, The Search for Government Efficiency: From Hubris to Helplessness, in which they begin their discussion of "Basic Concepts" with the same quote.

2. For a more extensive treatment of this topic, see Ralph P. Hummel's discussion of "the politization of bureaucracy" in The Bureaucratic Experience (New York: St. Martin's, 1987), pp. 221-228.

3. A more detailed description of the data collection and analysis procedures used in this study is provided in Fraatz, 1987, especially in the methodological appendix (pp. 205-215).

4. Research on ability groupings is vast and somewhat inconclusive. Recent evidence, however, has increasingly pointed to the limitations ability grouping places on the learning opportunities available to disadvantaged children. Of particular note is the research of Eder and Felmlee (1981, 1983, 1984), which suggests, among other things, that instruction in lower level reading groups is more likely to be interrupted, and that students in lower reading groups may encourage one another to engage in disruptive behavior. My own research in classroom reading instruction (Fraatz, 1987) suggests that teachers may pay less attention to individualizing instruction in lower reading groups than in higher groups. Ironically, however, ability grouping was among the first practices administrators would mention in response to the question, "What do schools do to try to ensure that each child has a fair chance to learn to read?"